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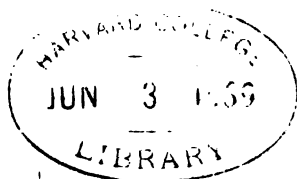
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The President's Office.

ADDRESS

BY

S. P. LANGLEY,

THE RETIRING PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION.

THE HISTORY OF A DOCTRINE.

“Man, being the servant and interpreter of nature, can do and understand so much, and so much only, as he has observed, in fact or in thought, of the course of nature. Beyond this he neither knows anything nor can do anything.”—BACON’S *Novum Organum*, aphorism 1.

IN these days, when a man can take but a very little portion of knowledge to be his province, it has become customary that your president’s address shall deal with some limited topic, with which his own labors have made him familiar; and accordingly I have selected as my theme, the history of our present views about radiant energy, not only because of the intrinsic importance of the subject, but because the study of this energy in the form of radiant heat is one to which I have given special attention.

Just as the observing youth, who leaves his own household to look abroad for himself, comes back with the report that the world, after all, is very like his own family, so may the specialist, when he looks out from his own department, be surprised to find that, after all, the history of the narrowest specialty is strangely like that of scientific doctrine in general, and contains the same lessons for us. To find some of the most useful ones, it is important, however, to look with our own eyes at the very words of the masters themselves, and to take down the dusty copy of Newton, or Boyle, or Leslie, instead of a modern abstract; for, strange as it may seem, there is something of great moment in the original that has never yet been incorporated into any encyclopædia, something really es-

sential in the words of the man himself which has not been indexed in any text-book, and never will be.

It is not for us, then, here to-day, to try

“How index-learning turns no student pale,
Yet holds the eel of science by the tail ; ”

but, on the contrary, to remark that from this index-learning, from these histories of science and summaries of its progress, we are apt to get wrong ideas of the very conditions on which this progress depends. We often hear it, for instance, likened to the march of an army toward some definite end ; but this, it has seemed to me, is not the way science usually does move, but only the way it seems to move in the retrospective view of the compiler, who probably knows almost nothing of the real confusion, diversity, and retrograde motion of the individuals comprising the body, and only shows us such parts of it as he, looking backward from his present standpoint, now sees to have been in the right direction.

I believe this comparison of the progress of science to that of an army, which obeys an impulse from one head, has more error than truth in it ; and, though all similes are more or less misleading, I would prefer to ask you to think rather of a moving crowd, where the direction of the whole comes somehow from the independent impulses of its individual members ; not wholly unlike a pack of hounds, which, in the long-run, perhaps catches its game, but where, nevertheless, when at fault, each individual goes his own way, by scent, not by sight, some running back and some forward ; where the louder-voiced bring many to follow them, nearly as often in a wrong path as in a right one ; where the entire pack even has been known to move off bodily on a false scent ;—for this, if a less dignified illustration, would be one which had the merit of having a truth in it, left out of sight by the writers of text-books.

At any rate, the actual movement has been tortuous, or often even retrograde, to a degree of which you will get no idea from the account in the text-book or encyclopædia, where, in the main, only the resultant of all these vacillating motions is given. With rare exceptions, the backward steps—that is, the errors and mistakes, which count in reality for nearly half, and sometimes for more than half, the whole—are left out of scientific history ; and the reader, while he knows that mistakes have been made, has no just idea how intimately error and truth are mingled in a sort of chemical union, even in the work of the great discoverers, and how

it is the test of time chiefly,—which enables us to say which *is* progress, when the man himself could not. If this be a truism, it is one which is often forgotten, and which we shall do well to here keep before us.

This is not the occasion to review the vague speculations of the ancient natural philosophers from Aristotle to Zeno, or to give the opinion of the schoolmen on our subject. We take it up with the immediate predecessors of Newton, among whom we may have been prepared to expect some obscure recognition of heat as a mode of motion, but where it has been, to me at least, surprising, on consulting their original works, to find how general and how clear an anticipation of our modern doctrine may be fairly said to exist. Whether this early recognition be a legacy from the Lucretian philosophy, it is not necessary to here consider. The interesting fact, however it came about, is the extent to which seventeenth-century thought is found to be occupied with views which we are apt to think very recent.

Descartes, in 1664, commences his “*Le-Monde*” by a treatise on the propagation of light, and what we should now call radiant heat by vibrations, and further associates this view of heat as motion with the distinct additional conception, that in the cause of light and radiant heat we may expect to find something quite different from the sense of vision or of warmth; and he expresses himself with the aid of the same simile of sound employed by Draper over two hundred years later. The writings of Boyle on the mechanical production of heat contain illustrations (like that of the hammer driving the nail, which grows hot in proportion as its bodily motion is arrested) which show a singularly complete apprehension of views we are apt to think we have made our own; and it seems to me that any one who consults the originals will admit, that, though its full consequences have not been wrought out till our own time, yet the fundamental idea of heat as a mode of motion is so far from being a modern one, that it was announced in varying forms by Newton’s immediate predecessors, by Descartes, by Bacon, by Hobbes, and in particular by Boyle, while Hooke and Huyghens merely continue their work, as at first does Newton himself.

If, however, Newton found the doctrine of vibrations already, so to speak, “in the air,” we must, while recognizing that in the

history of thought the new always has its root in the old, and that it is not given even to a Newton to create an absolutely new light, still admit that the full dawn of our subject properly begins with him, and admit, too, that it is a bright one, when we read in the "Optics" such passages as these:—

"Do not all fixed bodies, when heated beyond a certain degree, emit light and shine, and is not this emission performed by the vibrating motions of their parts?" And again: Do not several sorts of rays make vibrations of several bignesses?" And still again: "Is not the heat conveyed by the vibrations of a much subtler medium than air?"

Here is the undulatory theory; here is the connection of the ethereal vibrations with those of the material solid; here is "heat as a mode of motion;" here is the identity of radiant heat and light; here is the idea of wave-lengths. What a step forward this first one is! And the second?

The second is, as we know, backward. The second is the rejection of this, and the adoption of the corpuscular hypothesis, with which alone the name of Newton (a father of the undulatory theory) is, in the minds of most, associated to-day.

Do not let us forget, however, that it was on the balancing of arguments from the facts then known, that he decided, and that perhaps it was rather an evidence of his superiority to Huyghens, that apprehending equally clearly with the latter, the undulatory theory, he recognized also more clearly that this theory, as then understood, utterly failed to account for several of the most important phenomena. With an equally judicial mind, Huyghens would perhaps have decided so too, in the face of difficulties, all of which have not been cleared up even to-day. These two great men, then, each looked around in the then darkness as far as his light carried him. All beyond that was chance to each; and fate willed that Newton, whose light shone farther than his rival's, found it extend just far enough to show the entrance to the wrong way. He reaches the conclusion that we all know; one not only wrong in regard to light, but which bears pernicious results on the whole theory of heat, since light being conceded to be material, radiant heat, if affiliated to light, must be regarded as material too, and Newton's influence is so permanent, that we shall see this strange conclusion drawn by the contemporaries of Herschel from his experiments made a hundred years later.

It would seem then that the result of this unhappy corpuscular theory was more far-reaching than we commonly suppose, and that it is hardly too much to say that the whole promising movement of that age toward the true doctrine of radiant energy is not only arrested by it, but turned the other way; so that in this respect the philosophy of fifty years later is actually farther from the truth than that of Newton's predecessors, and the immense repute of Newton as a leader, on the whole so rightly earned, here leads astray others than his conscious disciples, and, it seems to me, affects men's opinions on topics which appear at first far removed from those he discussed. The adoption of phlogiston was, as we may reasonably infer, facilitated by it, and remotely Newton is perhaps also responsible in part for the doctrine of caloric a hundred years later. After him, at any rate, there is a great backward movement. We have a distinct retrogression from the ideas of Bacon and Hobbes and Boyle. Night settles in again on our subject almost as thick as in the days of the schoolmen, and there seems to be hardly an important contribution to our knowledge, in the first part of the eighteenth century, due to a physicist.

"Physics, beware of metaphysics," said Newton,—words which physicists are apt so exclusively to quote, that it seems only due to candor to observe that the most important step, perhaps, in the fifty years which followed the "Optics," came from Berkeley, who, reasoning as a metaphysician, gave us during Newton's lifetime a conception wonderfully in advance of his age. Yet the "New Theory of Vision" was generally viewed by contemporary philosophers as only an amusing paradox, while "coxcombs vanquish[ed] Berkeley with a grin;" and this contribution to science,—an exceptional if not a unique instance of a great physical generalization reached by *a priori* reasoning,—though published in 1709, remains in advance of the popular knowledge even in these closing years of the nineteenth century.

In the meantime a new error had risen among men,—a new truth, as it seemed to them,—and a thing destined to have a strong reflex action on the doctrine of radiant energy. It began with the generalization of a large class of phenomena which we now associate with the action of oxygen, then of course unknown, a generalization useful in itself, and accompanied by an explanation which was not in its origin objectionable. Let us consider, in illustration,

any familiar instance of oxidation, and try to look first for what was reasonable in the eighteenth-century views of the cause of such phenomena.

A piece of dry wood has in it the power of giving out heat and light when set on fire; but after it is consumed there is left of it only inert ashes, which can give neither. Something, then, has left the wood in process of becoming ashes; virtue has gone out of it, or, as we should say, its potential energy has gone.

This is, so far, an important observation, extending over a wide range of phenomena, and, if it had presented itself to the predecessors of Newton, it would probably have been allied to the vibratory theories, and become proportionately fruitful. But to his disciples, and to chemists and others, who, without being perhaps disciples, were like all then, more or less consciously influenced by the materiality of the corpuscular theory, it appeared that this virtue also was a material emanation;—that this energy was an actual ingredient of the wood,—a crudeness of conception which seems most strange to us, but is not perhaps unaccountable in view of the then current thought.

I have said that the progress of science is not so much that of an army as of a crowd of searchers, and that a call in a false direction may be responded to, not by one only, but by the whole body. In illustration, observe that during the greater part of the entire eighteenth century, this doctrine was adopted by almost every chemist and by many physicists. It had as general an acceptance among chemists then as the kinetic theory of gases, for instance, has among physicists now, and, so far as time is any test of truth, it was tested more severely than the kinetic theory has yet been; for it was not only the lamp and guide of chemists, and to a great extent of physicists also, but it remained the time-honored and highest generalization of chemical science for over half a century, and it was accepted not so much as a conditional hypothesis, as a final guide, and a conquest for truth which should endure always. And now where is it? Dissipated so utterly from men's minds, that, to the unprofessional part of even an educated audience like this, "phlogiston," once a name to conjure with, has become an unmeaning sound.

There is no need to insist on the application of the obvious moral to hypotheses of our own day.

I have tried to recall for a moment all that "phlogiston" meant

a little more than a hundred years ago, partly because it seems to me, that, though a chemical conception, physics is not blameless for it, but chiefly because before it quitted the world it appears to have returned to physics the wrong in a multiplied form, by generating an offspring specially inimical to true ideas about radiant heat, and which is represented by a yet familiar term. I mean "caloric."

This word is still used loosely as a synonyme for heat, but has quite ceased to be the very definite and technical term it once was. To me it has been new to find that this so familiar word "caloric," so far as my limited search has gone, was apparently coined only toward the last quarter of the last century. It is not to be found in the earliest edition of Johnston's dictionary, and, as far as I can learn, appears first in the corresponding French form in the works of Fourcroy. It expressed an idea which was the natural sequence of the phlogiston theory, and which is another illustration that the evil which such theories do lives after them.

"Caloric" first seemingly appears, then, as a word coined by the French chemists, and meant originally to signify the unknown cause of the sensation heat, without any implication as to its nature. But words, we know, though but wise men's counters, are the money of fools; and this one very soon came to commit its users to an idea which was more likely to have had its origin in the mind of a chemist at that time than of any other,—the idea of the cause of heat as a material ingredient of the hot body; something not, it is true, having weight, but which it would have been only a slight extension of the conception, to think might one day be isolated by a higher chemical art, and exhibited in a tangible form.

We may desire to recognize the perverted truth which usually underlies error and gives it currency, and be willing to believe that even "caloric" may have had some justification for its existence; but this error certainly seems to have been almost altogether pernicious for nearly the next eighty years, and down even to our own time. With this conception as a guide to the philosophers of the last years of the eighteenth century, it is not, at any rate, surprising if we find that at the end of a hundred years from Newton the crowd seems to be still going constantly farther and farther away from its true goal.

The doctrine of caloric is, however, always recognized as an hypothesis more acceptable to chemists than to physicists, some of

whom still stand out for the theories of Newton's predecessors, even through the darkest years; so that the old idea of heat, as a mode of motion, has by no means so utterly died that it does not appear here and there during the last century, and indeed, not only among philosophers, but even in a popular form.

In an old English translation of Father Regnault's compilation on physics, dated about 1730, I find, for instance, the most explicit statement of the doctrine of heat as a mode of motion. Here heat is defined (with the aid of a simile due, I believe, to Boyle) as "any Agitation whatever of the insensible parts. Thus a Nail which is drove into the Wood by the stroke of a Hammer does not appear to be hot, because its immediate parts have but one common Movement. But should the Nail cease to drive, it would acquire a sensible Heat, because its insensible Parts which receive the Motion of the Hammer now acquire an agitation every way rapid." We certainly must admit that the user of this illustration had just and clear ideas; and the interesting point here appears to be, that as Father Regnault's was not an original work, but a mere compendium or popular scientific treatise of the period, we see, if only from this instance, that the doctrine of heat as a mode of motion was not confined to the great men of an earlier or a later time, but formed a part of the common pabulum during the eighteenth century to an extent that has been forgotten.

Although Prevost gave us his most material contribution about 1790, we have, it seems to me, on the whole, little to interest us during that barren time in the history of radiant energy called the eighteenth century,—a century in which science wore the pedant's cap and gown, and her students read the poem of Creation like grammarians, for its syntax;—a century whose latter years are given up, till near its very close, to bad *a priori* theories in our subject, except in the work of two Americans; for in the general dearth at this time of experiments in radiant heat, it is a pleasure to fancy Benjamin Franklin sitting down before the fire, with a white stocking on one leg and a black one on the other, to see which leg would burn first, and to recall again how Benjamin Thompson (Count Rumford) not only weighed "caloric" literally in the balance and found it wanting, but made that memorable experiment in the Munich founderies which showed that heat was perpetually and without limit created from motion.

It was in the last years of the century, too, that he provided for

the medal called by his name, and which, though to be given for researches in heat and light, has, I believe, been allotted in nearly every instance to men, who, like Leslie, Malus, Davy, Brewster, Fresnel, Melloni, Faraday, Arago, Stokes, Maxwell, and Tyndall, have contributed toward the subject of radiant energy in particular.

We observe that before this time the scientific literature of the century scarcely considers the idea even of radiant heat, still less of radiant energy, so that we have been obliged here to discuss the views of its physicists about heat in general, heat and light in most minds being then distinct entities; all the ways for pilgrims to this special shrine of truth being barred, like those in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, by the two unfriendly giants who are here called *Phlogiston* and *Caloric*, so that there are few scientific pilgrims who do not pay them toll.

The last years of this century were destined to see the most remarkable experiments in heat made in the whole of the hundred; for the memoir of Rumford appeared in the *Philosophical Transactions* for 1798; and in the very year 1800 appeared in the same place Sir William Herschel's paper, in which he describes how he placed a thermometer in successive colors of the solar spectrum, finding the heat increase progressively from the violet to the red, and increase yet more beyond the red where there was no color or light whatever; so that there are, he observes, invisible rays as well as visible. More than that, the first outnumber the second; and these dark rays are found in the very source and fount of light itself. These dark rays can also be obtained, he observes, from a candle or a piece of non-luminous hot iron, and, what is very significant, they are found to pass through glass, and to be refracted by it like luminous ones.

And now Herschel, searching for the final verity through a series of excellent experiments, asks a question which shows that he has truth, so to speak, in his hands,— he asks himself the great question whether heat and light be occasioned by the same or different rays.

Remember the importance of this (which the querist himself fully recognized); remember, that, after long hunting in the blind-fold search, he has laid hands, as we now know, on the truth herself, and then see him — let go. He decides that heat and light are not occasioned by the same rays, and we seem to see the fugi-

tive escape from his grasp, not to be again fairly caught till the next generation.

I hardly know more remarkable papers than these of Herschel's in the Philosophical Transactions for 1800, or anything more instructive in little men's successes than in this great man's failure, which came in the moment of success. I would strongly recommend the reading of these remarkable original memoirs to any physicist who knows them only at second-hand.

One more significant lesson remains, in the effect of this on the minds of his contemporaries. Herschel's observation is to us almost a demonstration of the identity of radiant heat and light; but now, though the nineteenth century is opening, it is with the doctrine in the minds of most physicists, and perhaps of all chemists, that heat is occasioned by a certain material fluid. Phlogiston is by this time dead or dying, but Caloric is very much alive, and never more perniciously active than now, when, for instance, years after Herschel's observation, we find this cited as "demonstrating the existence of caloric;"— which was, it seems, the way it looked to a contemporary.

In the year 1804 appeared what should be a very notable book in the history of our subject, written by Sir John Leslie, whose name survives perhaps in the minds of many students chiefly in connection with the "cube" which is still called after him.

Leslie, however, ought to be remembered as a man of original genius, worthy to be mentioned with Herschel and Melloni; and his, too, is one of the books which the student may be recommended to read, at least in part, in the original; not so much for the writer's instructive experiments (which will be found in our text-books) as for his most instructive mistakes, which the text-book will probably not mention.

He began by introducing the use of the simple instrument which bears his name, and a new and more delicate heat-measurer (the differential thermometer); and with these, and concave reflectors of glass and metal, he commenced experiments in radiant heat, than which, he tells us, no part of physical science then appeared so dark, so dubious, and so neglected. It is interesting, and it marks the degree of neglect he alludes to, that his first discovery was that different substances have different radiating and absorbing powers. It gives us a vivid idea of the density of previous ignorance, that it was left to the present century to demonstrate

this elementary fact, and that Leslie, in view of such discoveries, says, "I was transported at the prospect of a new world emerging to view."

Next he shows that the radiating and absorbing powers are proportional, next that cold as well as heat seems to be radiated, and next undertakes to see whether this radiant heat has any affinity to light. He then experiments in the ability of radiant heat to pass through a transparent glass, which transmits light freely, and thinks he finds that none does pass. Radiant heat with him seems to mean heat from non-luminous sources; and the ability or non-ability of this to pass through glass, is to Leslie and his successors a most crucial test, and its failure to do so a proof that this heat is not affiliated to light.

Let us pause a moment here to reflect that we are apt to unconsciously assume, while judging from our own present standpoint where past error is so plain, that the false conclusion can only be chosen by an able, earnest, conscientious seeker, after a sort of struggle. Not so. Such a man is found welcoming the false with rapture, as very truth herself.

"What, then," says Leslie, "is this calorific and frigorific fluid after which we are inquiring? It is not light, it has no relation to ether, it bears no analogy to the fluids, real or imaginary, of magnetism and electricity. But why have recourse to invisible agents? *Quod petis, hic est.* It is merely the ambient AIR."

The capitals are Leslie's own, but ere we smile with superior knowledge, let us put ourselves in his place, and then we may comprehend the exultation with which he announces the identity of radiant heat and common air, for he feels that he is beginning a daring revolt against the orthodox doctrine of caloric; and so he is.

The first five years of this century are notable in the history of radiant energy, not only for the work of Leslie, and for the observation by Wollaston, Ritter, and others, of the so-called "chemical" rays beyond the violet, but for the appearance of Young's papers, reëstablishing the undulatory theory, which he indeed considered in regard to light, but which was obviously destined to affect most powerfully the theory of radiant energy in general.

We are now in the year 1804, or over a century and a quarter since the corpuscular theory was emitted, and during that time it has gradually grown to be an article of faith in a sort of scientific church, where Newton has come to be looked on as an infallible

head, and his views as dogmas, about which no doubt is to be tolerated ; but if we could go back to Cambridge in the year 1668, when the obscure young student, in no way conscious of his future pontificate, takes his degree (standing twenty-third on the list of graduates), we should probably find that he had already elaborated and greatly improved certain already current ideas into the undulatory theory of light, which he at any rate promulgated a few years later, and afterward, pressed with many difficulties, altered, as we now know, to an emissive one.

Probably, if we could have heard his own statement then, he would have told how sorely tried he was between these two opinions, and, while explaining to us how the wavering balance came to lean as it did, would have admitted, with the modesty proper to such a man, that there was a great deal to be said on either side. We may, at any rate, be sure that it would not be from the lips of Newton himself that we should have had this announced as a belief which was to be part of the rule of faith to any man of science.

But observe how, if science and theology look askance at each other, it is still true that some scientific men and some theologians have, at any rate, more in common than either is ready to admit ; for at the beginning of this century Newton's followers, far less tolerant than their master, have made out of this modest man a scientific pontiff, and out of his diffident opinions a positive dogma, till as years go on, he comes to be cited as so infallible that a questioning of these opinions is an offence deserving excommunication.

This has grown to be the state of things in 1804, when Young, a man possessing something of Newton's own greatness, ventures to put forward some considerations to show that the undulatory theory may be the true one, after all. But the prevalent and orthodox scientific faith was still that of the material nature of light ; the undulatory hypothesis was a heresy, and Young a heretic. If his great researches had been reviewed by a physicist or a brother worker, who had himself trodden the difficult path of discovery, he might have been treated at least intelligently ; but then, as always, the camp-followers, who had never been at the front, shouted from a safe position in the rear to the man in the dust of the fight, that he was not proceeding according to the approved rules of tactics ; then, as always, these men stood between the public and the investigator, and distributed praise or blame.

If you wish to hear how the scientific heretic should be rebuked

for his folly, listen to one who never made an observation, but, having a smattering of everything books could teach about every branch of knowledge, was judged by himself and by the public to be the fittest interpreter to it, of the physical science of this day. I mean Henry Brougham, the universal critic, the future Lord-chancellor of England, of whom it was observed, that, "if he had but known a little *law*, he would have known a little of everything." He uses the then all-powerful *Edinburgh Review* for his pulpit, and from it fulminates the condemnations of the church on the innovating memoir of the heretical Young.

"This paper," he says, "contains nothing which deserves the name of experiment or discovery; and it is, in fact, destitute of every species of merit . . . first is another lecture, containing more fancies, more blunders, more unfounded hypotheses, more gratuitous fictions . . . and all from the fertile yet fruitless brain of the eternal Dr. Young. In our second number we exposed the absurdity of this writer's 'law of interference,' as it pleases him to call one of the most incomprehensible suppositions that we remember to have met with in the history of human hypotheses."

There are whole pages of it, but this is enough; and I cite this passage among many such at command, not only as an example of the way the undulatory theory was treated at the beginning of this century in the first critical journal of Europe, but as another example of the general rule that the same thing may appear intrinsically absurd, or intrinsically reasonable, according to the year of grace in which we hear of it. The great majority, even of students of science, must take their opinions ready-made as to science in general; each knowing, so far as he can be said to know anything at first-hand, only that little corner which research has made specially his own.

The moral we can all draw, I think, for ourselves.

In spite of such criticism as this, the undulatory hypothesis of light made rapid way, and carried with it, one would now say, the necessary inference that radiant heat was due to undulations also. This was, however, no legitimate inference to those to whom radiant heat was still a fluid; and yet, in spite of all, the modern doctrine now begins to make visible progress.

A marked step is taken about 1811 by a young Frenchman, De la Roche, who deserves to be better remembered than he is, for he clearly anticipated some of Melloni's discoveries. De la Roche in

particular shows that of two successive screens the second absorbs heat in a less ratio than the first; whence he, before any one else, I believe, derives the just and most important, as well as the then most novel conception, that radiant heat is of different *kinds*. He sees also, that, as a body is heated more and more, there is a gradual and continual advance not only in the amount of heat it sends out, but in the kind, so that, as the temperature still rises, the radiant heat becomes light by imperceptible gradations; and he concludes that heat and light are due to one simple agent, which, as the temperature rises yet more, appears more and more as light, or which, as the luminous radiation is absorbed, re-appears as heat. Very little of it, he observes, passes even transparent screens at low temperatures, but more and more does so as the temperature rises.

All this is a truism in 1888, but it appears admirably new as well as true in 1811; and if De la Roche had not been removed by an early death, his would have not improbably been the greatest name of the century in the history of our subject; an honor, however, which was in fact reserved for another.

The idea of the identity of light and radiant heat had by this time made such progress that the attempt to polarize the latter was made in 1818 by Berard. We have just seen in Herschel's case how the most sound experiment may lead to a wrong conclusion, if it controvert the popular view. We now have the converse of this in the fact that the zeal of those who are really in the right way may lead to unsound and inconclusive experiment; for Berard experimentally established, as it was supposed, the fact that obscure radiant heat can be polarized. So it can, but not with such means as Berard possessed, and it was not till a dozen years more that Forbes actually proved it.

At this time, however fairly we seem embarked on the paths of study which are followed to-day, and while the movement of the main body of workers is in the right direction, it is yet instructive to observe how eminent men are still spending great and conscientious labor, their object in which is to advance the cause, while the effect of it is to undo the little which has been rightly done, and to mislead those who have begun to go right.

As an instance both of this and of the superiority of modern apparatus, we may remark,—after having noticed that the ability of obscure heat to pass through glass, if completely established, would

be a strong argument in favor of its kinship to light, and that De la Roche and others had indicated that it would do so (in which we now know they were right),—that at this stage, or about 1816, Sir David Brewster, the eminent physicist, made a series of experiments which showed that it would not so pass. Ten years later, in view of the importance of the theoretical conclusion, Baden Powell repeated his observations with great care, and confirmed them, announcing that the earlier experimenters were wrong, and that Brewster was right; so that here all these years of conscientious work resulted in establishing, so far as it could be established, a wholly wrong conclusion in place of a right one already gained.

It may be added, that with our present apparatus, the passage of obscure radiant heat through glass could be made convincingly evident in an experiment which need not last a single second.

We are now arrived at a time when the modern era begins; and in looking back over one hundred and fifty years, from the point of view of the experimenter himself, with his own statement of the truth as he saw it, we find that the comparison of the progress of science to that of an army, which moves, perhaps with the loss of occasional men, but on the whole victoriously and in one direction, is singularly misleading; and I state this more confidently here, because there are many in this audience who did not get their knowledge of nature from books only, but who have searched for the truth themselves; and, speaking to them, may I not say that those who have so searched know that the most honest purpose and the most patient striving have not been guaranties against mistakes,—mistakes which were probably hailed at the time as successes? It was some one of the fraternity of seekers, I am sure, who said, "Show me the investigator who has never made a mistake, and I will show you one who has never made a discovery."

We have seen the whole scientific body, as regards this particular science of radiant energy, moving in a mass, in a wrong direction, for a century; we have seen that individuals in it go on their independent paths of error; and we can only wonder that an era should have come in which such a real advance is made as in ours.

That era has been brought in by the works of many, but more than by any other through the fact that, in the year 1801, there came into the world at Parma an infant who was born a physicist,

as another is born a poet; nay, more; who was born, one might say, a devotee of one department of physics, that of radiant heat; being affected in his tenderest years with such a kind of precocious passion for the subject as the childish Mozart showed for music. He was ready to sacrifice everything for it; he struggled through untold difficulties, not for the sake of glory or worldly profit, but for radiant heat's sake; and when fame finally came to him, and he had the right to speak of himself, he wrote a preface to his collected researches, which is as remarkable as anything in his works. In this preface he has given us, not a summary of previous memoirs on the subject, not a table of useful factors and formulæ, not anything at all that an English or an American scientific treatise usually begins with, but the ingenuous story of his first love, of his boyish passion for this beloved mistress; and all this with a trust in us his readers which is beautiful in its childlike confidence in our sympathy.

I should need to abbreviate and injure in order to quote; but did ever a learned physical treatise and collection of useful tables begin like this before?

"I was born at Parma, and when I got a holiday used to go into the country the night before, and go to bed early, so as to get up before the dawn. Then I used to steal silently out of the house, and run, with bounding heart, till I got to the top of a little hill, where I used to set myself so as to look toward the East." There, he tells us, he used, in the stillness of nature, to wait the rising sun, and feel his attention rapt, less with the glorious spectacle of the morning light itself than with the sense of the mysterious heat which accompanied its beams, and brought something more necessary to our life and that of all nature than the light itself, so that the idea that not only mankind, but nature, would perish though the light continued, if this was divorced from heat, made a profound impression, he tells us, on his childish mind.

The statement that such an idea could enter with dominating force into the mind of a child will perhaps seem improbable to most. It will, however, be credible enough to some here, I have no doubt.

Is there some ornithologist present who remembers a quite infantile attraction which birds possessed for him above all the rest of the animated creation? some chemist whose earliest recollections are of the strange and quite abnormal interest he found as a child in making experimental mixtures of every kind of accessible house-

hold fluid and solid? some astronomer who remembers that when a very little creature not only the sight of the stars, but of any work on astronomy, even if utterly beyond his childish comprehension, had an incomprehensible attraction for him? I will not add to the list. There are, at any rate, many here who will understand Melloni when he tells how this radiant heat, commonplace to others, was wonderful to his childish thought, and wrought a charm on it such that he could not see wood burn in a fireplace, or look at a hot stove, without its drawing his mind, not to the fire or iron itself, but to the mysterious effluence which it sent.

This was the youth of genius; but let not any fancy that genius in research is to be argued from such premonitions alone, unless it can add to them that other qualification of genius which has caused it to be named the faculty of taking infinite pains. Melloni's subsequent labors justified this last definition also; but I cannot speak of them here, further than to say, that, after going over a large part of his work myself, with modern methods and with better apparatus, he seems to me the man, of all great students of our subject, who, in reference to what he accomplished, made the fewest mistakes.

Melloni is very great as an experimenter, and owes much of his success to the use of the newly invented thermopile, which is partly his own. I can here, however, speak only of his results, and of but two of these,—one generally known; the other, and the more important, singularly little known, at least in connection with him.

The first is the full recognition of the fact, partly anticipated by De la Roche, that radiant heat is of different kinds, and that the invisible emanations differ among themselves just as those of light do. Melloni not only established the fact, but invented a felicitous term for it, which did a great deal to stamp it on recognition,—the term “thermochrose,” or heat-color, which helps us to remember, that, as the visible and apparently simple emanation of light is found to have its colors, so radiant heat, the invisible but apparently simple emanation, has what would be colors to an eye that could see them. This result is well known in connection with Melloni.

The other and the greater, which is not generally known as Melloni's, is the generalization that heat and light are effects of one and the same thing, and merely different manifestations of it.

I translate this important statement as closely as possible from his own words. They are that

"Light is merely a series of calorific indications sensible to the organs of sight, or vice versa, the radiations of obscure heat are veritable INVISIBLE RADIATIONS of light."

The italics and the capitals are Melloni's own. He wishes to have no ambiguity about his announcement behind which he may take shelter; and he had so firm a grasp of the great principle, that, when his first attempts to observe the heat of the moon failed, he persevered, because this principle assured him that where there was light there must be heat. This statement was made in 1843, and ought, I think, to insure to Melloni the honor of being first to thus distinctly announce this great generalization.

The announcement passed apparently unnoticed, in spite of his acknowledged authority; and the general belief not merely in different entities in the spectrum, but in a material caloric, continued as strong as ever. If you want to see what a hold on life error has, and how hard it dies, turn to the article "heat," in the eighth edition of the "Encyclopædia Britannica," where you will find the old doctrine of caloric still in possession of the field in 1853; and still later, in the generally excellent "English Encyclopædia" (edition of 1867), the doctrine of caloric is, on the whole, preferred to the undulatory hypothesis. It is very probable that a searcher might find many traces of it yet lingering among us; so that Giant Caloric is not, perhaps, even yet quite dead, though certainly grown so crazy and stiff in the joints, that he can now harm pilgrims no more.

So far as I know, no physicist of eminence reasserted Melloni's principle with equal emphasis, till J. W. Draper, in 1872. Only sixteen years ago, or in 1872, it was almost universally believed that there were three different entities in the spectrum, represented by actinic, luminous and thermal rays. Draper remarks that a ray consists solely of ethereal vibrations whose lost *vis viva* may produce either heat or chemical change. He uses Descartes' analogy of the vibration of the air, and sound; but he makes no mention either of Descartes or of Melloni, and speaks of the principle as leading to a modification of views then "universally" held. Since that time the theory has made such rapid progress, that, though some of the older men in England and on the European continent

have not welcomed it, its adoption among all physicists of note may be said to be now universal, and a new era in our history begins with it. I mean with the recognition that there is one radiant energy which appears to us as "actinic," or "luminous" or "thermal" radiation, according to the way we observe it. Heat and light, then, are not things in themselves, but whether different sensations in our own bodies, or different effects in other bodies, are merely effects of this mysterious thing we call radiant energy, without doing more in this than give a name to the ignorance which still hangs over the ultimate cause. ✓

I am coming down dangerously near our own time, for one who would be impartial in dealing with names of those still living. In such a brief review of this century's study of radiant energy in other forms than light, it has been necessary to pass without mention the labors of such men as Pouillet and Becquerel in France, of Tyndall in England, and of Henry in America. It has been necessary to omit all mention of those who have advanced the knowledge of radiant energy as light, or I should have had to speak of labors so diverse as those of Fraunhofer, of Kirchhoff, of Fresnel, of Stokes, of Lockyer, of Jannsen, and many more. I have made no mention, in the instructive history of error, of many celebrated experimental researches; in particular of such a problem as the measurement of solar heat, great in importance, but apparently most simple in solution, yet which has now been carried on from generation to generation, each experimenter materially altering the result of his predecessor, and where our successors will probably correct our own results in turn. I have not spoken of certain purely experimental investigations, like those of Dulong and Petit, which have involved immense and conscientious labor, and have apparently rightly earned the name of "classic" from one generation, only to be recognized by the next as leading to untrustworthy results, and leaving the work to be done again with new methods, guided by new principles.

. In these instances, painstaking experiments have proved insufficient, less from want of skill in the investigator than from his ignorance of principles not established in time to enable him to interpret his experiments; but, if there were opportunity, it would be profitable to show how inexplicably sometimes error flourishes, grows, and maintains an apparently healthy appearance of truth,

without having any root whatever. Perhaps I may cite one instance of this last from my own experience.

About ten years ago it was generally believed that the earth's atmosphere acted exactly the part of the glass in a hotbed, and that it kept the planet warm by exerting a specially powerful absorption on all infra-red rays. I had been trained in the orthodox scientific church, of which I am happy to be still a member; but I had acquired perhaps an almost undue respect, not only for her doctrines, but for her least sayings. Accordingly, when my own experiments did not agree with the received statement, I concluded that my experiments must be wrong, and made them all over again, till spring, summer, autumn and winter had passed, each season giving its own testimony; and this for successive years. The final conclusion was irresistible, that the universal statement of this alleged well-known fact, inexplicable as this might seem, in so simple a matter, was directly contradicted by experiment. I had some natural curiosity to find how every one knew this to be a fact; but search only showed the same statement (that the earth's atmosphere absorbed dark heat like glass) repeated everywhere, with absolutely nowhere any observation or evidence whatever to prove it, but each writer quoting from an earlier one, till I was almost ready to believe it a dogma superior to reason, and resting on the well-known "*Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus, creditum est.*" Finally I appear to have found its source in the writings of Fourier, who, alluding to De Saussure's experiments (which showed that dark heat passed with comparative difficulty through glass), observes that if the earth's atmosphere were solid, it would act as the glass does. Fourier simply takes this (in which he is wrong) for granted; but, as he is an authority on the theory of heat, his words are repeated without criticism, first by Poisson, then by others, and then in the text-books; and, the statement gaining weight by age, it comes to be believed absolutely, on no evidence whatever, for the next sixty years, that our atmosphere is a powerful absorber of precisely those rays which it most freely transmits.

The question of fact here, though important, is, I think, quite secondary to the query it raises as to the possible unsuspected influence of mere tradition in science, when we do not recognize it as such. Now, members of any church are doubtless consistent in believing in traditions, if they believe that these are presented to

them by an infallible guide; but are we, who have no infallible guide, quite safe in believing all we do, from our fond persuasion that in the scientific body mere tradition has no weight?

In even this brief sketch of the growth of the doctrine of radiant energy, we have perhaps seen that the history of the progress of this department of science is little else than a chapter in that larger history of human error which is still to be written, and which, it is safe to say, would include illustrations from other branches of science, as well as my own. But—and here I ask pardon if I speak of myself—I have been led to review the labors of other searchers from this standpoint, because I had first learned, out of personal experience, that the greatest care was no certain guaranty of final accuracy: that to labor in the search for a truth with such endless pains as a man might bestow if his own salvation were in question, did not necessarily bring the truth; and because, seeking to see whether this were the lot of other and greater men, I have found that it was, and that, though no one was altogether free from the truth he sought, or on the whole review of his life as a seeker, but might believe he had advanced her cause, yet, when after long waiting, he saw once more what seemed her beautiful face, there was no absolute certainty that this might not be the mockery of error: and, doubtless, appeal might be made to the experience of many investigators here with the question, “Is it not so?”

What then? Shall we admit that truth is only to be surely found under the guidance of an infallible church? If there be such a church, yes! Let us, however, remember that the church of science is not such a one, and be ready to face all the consequences of the knowledge that her truths are put forward by her as provisional only, and that her most faithful children are welcome to disprove them.

What then, again? Shall we say that the knowledge of truth is not advancing? It is advancing, and never so fast as to-day; but the steps of its advance are set on past errors, and the new truths become such stepping-stones in turn.

To say that what are truths to one generation are errors to the next, or that truth and error are but different aspects of the same thing to our poor human nature, may be to utter truisms; but truisms which one has verified for one's self out of a personal experi-

ence are apt to have a special value to the owner ; and these lead, at any rate, to the natural question, " Where is, then, the evidence that *we* are advancing in reality, and not in our own imagination?"

There are many here who will no doubt heartily subscribe to the belief that there is no absolute criterion of truth for the individual, and admit that there is no positive guaranty that we, with this whole generation of scientific men, may not, like our predecessors, at times go the wrong way in a body, yet who believe as certainly that science as a whole, and this branch of it in particular, is actually advancing with hitherto unknown rapidity. In asking to be included in this number, let me add that to me the criterion of this advance is not in any ratiocination, not in any *a priori* truth, still less in the dictum of any authority, but in the undoubted observation that our doctrine of radiant energy is reaching out in every direction, and proving itself by the equally undoubted fact that through its aid nature obeys us more and more ; proving itself by such material evidence as is found in the electric lights in our streets, and in a thousand such ways which I need not pause to enumerate.

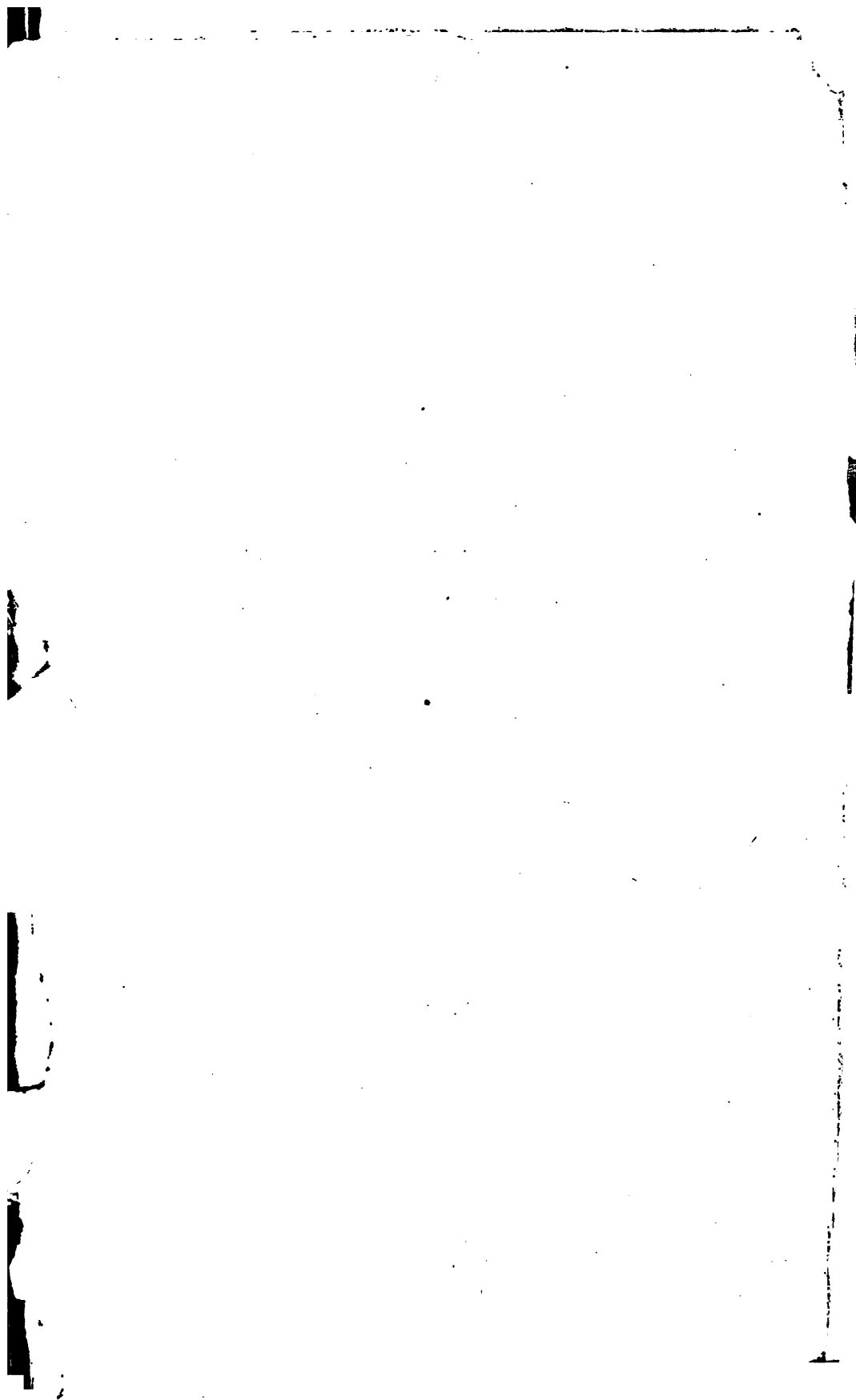
And here I might end, hoping that there may be some lessons for us in the history of what has been said. I will venture to ask attention to but one. It is that in these days, when the advantage of organization is so fully recognized, when there is a well-founded hope that by coöperation among scientific men knowledge may be more rapidly increased, and when not only in the great scientific departments of government but everywhere, there is a tendency to the formation of the divisions of a sort of scientific army, not to say of a scientific church — that at such a time we should yet remember, that, however rapidly science changes, human nature remains much the same ; and (while we are uttering truisms) let us venture to repeat that there is a very great deal of this " human nature " even in the scientific man, whose best type is one nearly as independent as nature itself, and one which will not always work best at the word of command. Let him then never forget that the history of science, scarcely less than of theology, warns him of the tendency of authority to exceed its proper sphere, and from without it, to define belief, and to impose obedience to doctrine.

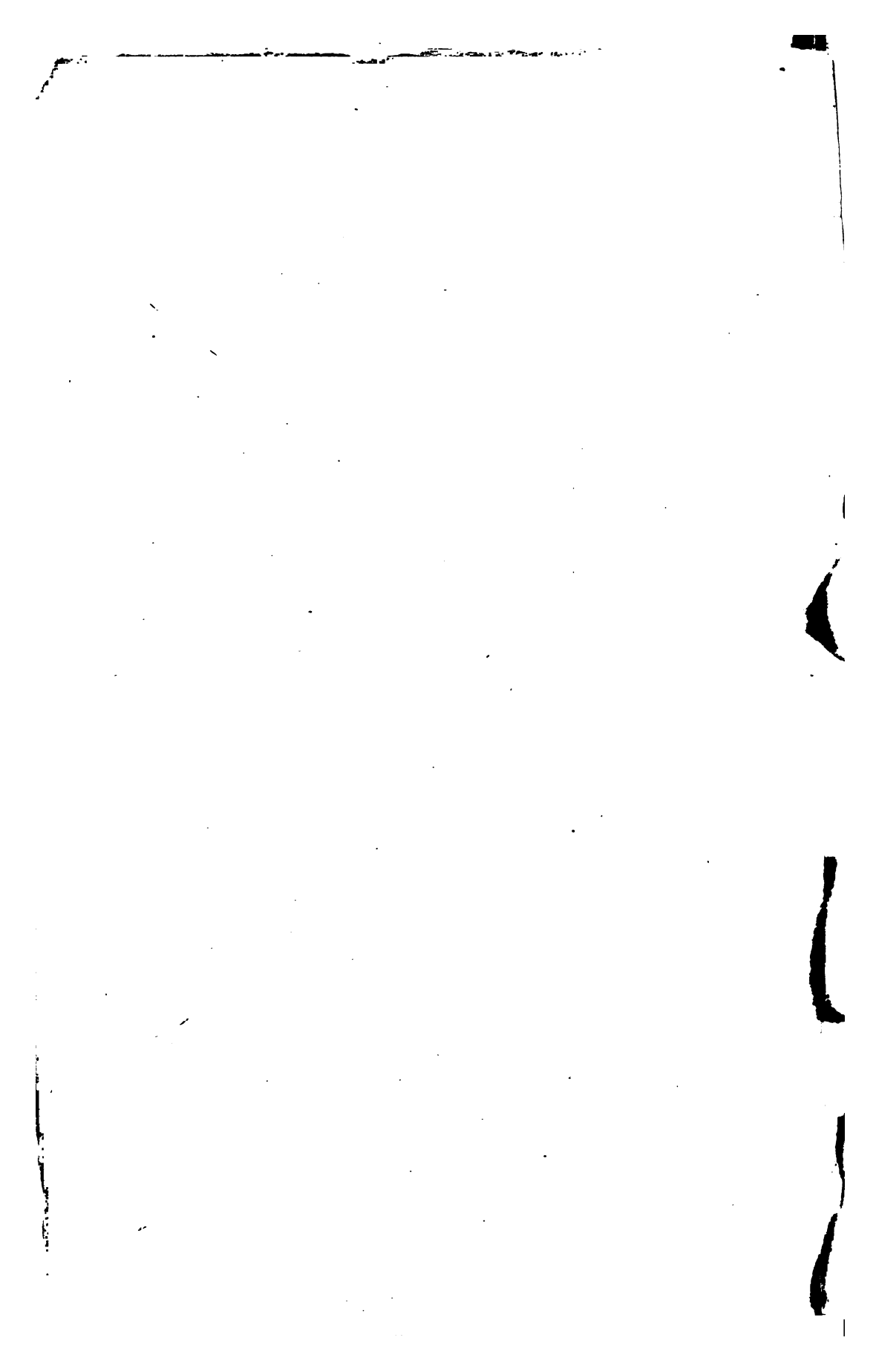
Finally, if, turning to the future, I were asked what I thought were the next great steps to be taken in the study of radiant heat,

I should feel unwilling to attempt to look more than a very little way in advance. Immediately before us, however, there is one great problem waiting solution. I mean the relation between temperature and radiation; for we know almost nothing of this, where knowledge would give new insight into almost every operation of nature (nearly every one of which is accompanied by the radiation or reception of heat), and would enable us to answer inquiries now put to physicists in vain by every department of science, from that of the naturalist as to the enigma of the brief radiation of the glow-worm, to that of the geologist who asks as to the number of million years required for the cooling of a world.

When, however, we begin to go beyond the points which seem, like this, to invite our very next steps in advance, we cannot venture to prophesy, and must content ourselves with the knowledge that through our study we are beginning to apprehend the full meaning of one of the early great ones of science, who described man as the meeting point of two infinities. That there is an infinity of space above him, man has long known, but that there is another absolute infinity, and the possibilities which lie in the infinitesimals of space, he is but beginning to realize. The secular movements, whose accomplishment demands more than a million years of time, he has already considered; but of the consequences which may result from a more careful study of actions occurring in the infinitesimals of time, and whose whole duration may be far less than the millionth of a second, he has hardly even yet begun to think; and these are but little portions of the ungarnered field of research, open to the student of that radiant energy which sustains, with our own being, that of all animated nature, of which humanity is but a part.

If there be any students of nature here, who, feeling drawn to labor in this great field of hers, still doubt whether there is yet room, surely it may be said to them, "Yes, just as much room as ever, as much room as the whole earth offered to the first man;" for everything that has been done in the past is, I believe, as nothing to what remains before us, and that field is simply unbounded. The days of hardest trial and incessant bewildering error in which your elders have wrought, seem over. You "in happier ages born," you of the younger and the coming race, who have a mind to enter in and possess it, may, as the last word here, be bidden to indulge in an equally unbounded hope.





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